

Movement for aboriginal land rights research paper examples

[Sociology](#), [Community](#)



Introduction

When the Commonwealth of Australia was declared, it was heralded that this move would usher in a new era of prosperity, especially for the inhabitants of the expansive country. While this was welcomed by some nationals, especially those of British origin, the Aborigines were not excited all the same. This is because the declaration of the Commonwealth of Australia ushered in an era of racial oppression and dispossession, from an Aborigine perspective. Unlike other colonial territories under British rule, for instance Canada and New Zealand where land treaties were signed before their land was taken for colonial occupation, the occupation of Aboriginal land in colonial Australia was done differently.

The seizure of land in Australia was done without recognition of prior ownership by the Aborigines. It has been argued that the natives in the colonies where land treaties were signed before land was taken away from them were not treated any better than the Aborigines were treated in Australia. However, it is disconcerting for the Aborigines that even though they were treated like immigrants and slaves in their land, they were not recognized as prior owners of that land, a status that land treaties bestowed on natives in other British colonial territories. It was factors like these that resulted in the resistance mounted by the Aborigines in order to safeguard their land rights (Chesterman, 2005, Pp. 87).

However, such resistance was widely sectoried until the 1960 when the movement for Aboriginal land rights gained momentum throughout the entire Commonwealth of Australia. This movement gained momentum due to the influence of certain people and through the actions embodying certain

events in Australia. This paper traces this phenomenon in order to determine why the movement for Aboriginal land rights gained momentum around this time, unlike other periods of time prior. The paper will also detail the people who greatly influenced this movement.

Land Rights

In order to understand the intricacies of the movement for Aboriginal land rights and as such answer the question at hand, it is important to understand the differences in perspectives between land rights from the Aboriginal perspective and that of the government. Many people forget the inherent need for genuine land ownership as championed for by the Aboriginals. This is because the prosperity and development in Australia is attributed to the dispossession of land from the Aboriginals, the denial of basic of human rights and the use of the Aborigines as slaves (Clark, 2008, Pp. 20). There is the general feeling that since the result of these commonly frowned upon atrocities was the mighty economy of Australia, the injustice that the Aboriginals suffered is a worthy price. There are disparaging differences between land rights from the original perspectives and that of the Australian government. The Aboriginal perspective encompasses sovereign land rights while that of the government does not go that far. This is one of the issues that led to the momentum of movement of Aboriginal land rights in the 1960s in Australia.

Causes for the momentum in Aboriginal land rights movement in the 1960s

Mining on Aboriginal Land and Aboriginal reserves

The movement for Aboriginal land rights started in earnest in 1966. The trigger for this movement was an issue that the Australian government had previously refused to address. Earlier in the 1960s mining of minerals was carried out on Aboriginal reserves in addition to Aboriginal land. This was done in blatant violation of issues that were preciously raised by the Aborigines (Banner, 2007, Pp. 45). More precisely, the mining on Aboriginal land and Aboriginal reserves was done without protracted consultations of negotiations with the Aboriginal people. This was against the wishes of the Aborigines in a number of ways. For instance, the Aborigines wanted sovereign land rights. Such rights would include full control and value for minerals and other resources in their land. This would in itself contradict with the powerful mining industry in Australia. The fact that the Aborigines did not get nay support from the government inadvertently gave more power to the mining industry in Australia (Langton, 2006, Pp. 32).

Need for Self Determination

Self-determination in this case should not be misconstrued for the self-determination for which colonized states fought. In this endeavor, the Aborigines wanted the government to afford them land rights that included genuine autonomy. Self determination in the Aboriginal perspective meant that they needed independence so that they no longer needed to rely on the Australian government for any form of support. Additionally, from an Aboriginal perspective, and actually in agreement with logic, access,

ownership and genuine control of land by the aborigines would allow them to make long term plans (Meadows, 2000, Pp. 65).

Such plans would the development of the native people of Australia. The implication of this phenomenon is that the social status, economic and health status of the Aboriginal people in Australia would be improved dramatically. Additionally, and much in line with their perspective of land rights, the Aboriginals saw land rights not only as an economic base but also as a spiritual base. In their perspective, they were demanding for land rights as opposed to the widespread opinion that they were asking to be given these rights. For the Aboriginals, it was about the undue recognition of their right to own land that was previously theirs before it was made crown land. In this regard, their rights would go past mere possession to encompass fishing, religious, camping and hunting rights (Coombs, 1994, Pp. 98).

These rights were forbidden in all the crown lands in the Commonwealth of Australia. In the earlier subtopic, mining in Aboriginal land and Aboriginal reserves, especially because it was done without negotiation or consultation was a pertinent issue. With these land rights and self determination, the Aboriginals would have the right to negotiate for compensation in case mining was done in the lands and reserves. In addition to this, the Aboriginals could even refuse mining to be done on any part of their land. It is this need for an improved life that gave impetus to the movement for Aboriginal rights in the 1960s (Behrendt, 2012, Pp. 25).

Key People involved in the Movement of Aboriginal Land rights in the 1960s

The movement for Aboriginal land rights in the 1960s was influenced by certain key people. These personalities helped to rally the community members towards a common goal. In fact, some of the activities organized by such people helped to propel the movement for Aboriginal land rights onto a national scale in the 1960s. One of these people is Vincent Lingiari. Vincent Lingiari was a community leader of the Gurindji Aboriginal people. He was also a stockman at the Wave Hill pastoral station. Vincent Lingiari led over two hundred Aboriginal stockmen from the Gurindji community of Aboriginals, together with their families. In this march, the two hundred strong group of Aboriginals camped at Wattie Creek, a region that was at the heart of a piece of land that was traditionally theirs (Jupp, 2001, Pp. 125). Additionally, the land also featured a site that had great cultural significance to the Aboriginal people of Gurindji community. Originally, the Wave Hill walk-off, as this event was dubbed initially championed for better living conditions and improved wages. However, due to the increased support and the headlines the Wave Hill walk-off was making throughout the Commonwealth of Australia, the movement quickly evolved to incorporate the fundamental issue of Aboriginal traditional lands. Under the leadership of this community leader, the Wave Hill walk-off effectively became the first claim on traditional lands in 1966. This event paved the way for an even more fervent claim for the Aboriginal land rights (Russel, 2012, Pp. 52). Activism was a chief way in which people championed for Aboriginal land rights in the 1960s. This is especially after the success that the Wave Hill

walk-off enjoyed in rallying support for the Aboriginal. In the spirit of activism, Gary Foley was an activist who championed for Aboriginal land rights, and was one of the driving forces of the movement for Aboriginal land rights in the 1960. As a historian for Gumbaynggirr, Gary Foley reckons that the movement for Aboriginal land rights in the 1960 focused in real ownership of land. In his conception, the Aboriginals needed total control over their land, so much so that the Aboriginals could determine the best use of their land. As he describes in Korff (2014), ‘ so we could say ‘ no, you can’t come in here’ or ‘ we want to do this with our land’. That’s what self-determination is – the power to control your own affairs’. Gary Foley, in his activism towards the land rights for Aboriginals underscored the importance of real ownership of land, especially in what he termed as a fundamental need in order to create a basis for Aboriginal people to survive the effects of colonialism. Part of his activism also underscored the importance of land rights in the recuperation and reconstruction process of the Aboriginal communities (Foley, Schaap & Howell, 2013, Pp. 78).

The movement for Aboriginal land rights took other forms apart from activism. Proponents of land rights also used petitions as an avenue for championing for land rights. One of the people who personified this avenue was Galarrwuy Yunupingu. Galarrwuy Yunupingu was the son of a clan leader of Gumat clan of Aboriginals. Galarrwuy Yunupingu was very instrumental in drafting the Yirrkala bark petitions 1963. These documents set precedents that gave impetus to the movement for the Aboriginal land rights in the 1960s. These documents were prepared by Aboriginal Australians and were the first documents from this group of people that were documented by the

Australian legislature. This petition demanded the recognition of the land rights of Aboriginals. The context of these petitions was the taking over of mining leases in the traditional land of Aboriginal Australians soon after minerals were discovered in the Gove Peninsula. These petitions asserted the fact that Yolngu people, Australian Aboriginals owned the land.

Additionally, the petitions also protested to the commonwealth of Australia for giving the rights to exploit minerals in their traditional land to Nabalco (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies & Clarke, 2003, Pp, 17).

Conclusion

The British colonial governments, for some reasons gained colonial land in Australian using a different approach compared to its other overseas territories. As espoused in the discussion, the British colonial government signed land treaties in other overseas colonies, something that was not done in Australia. This means that the land ownership rights of Aboriginal Australians were not recognized. The Australian government did not grant these rights to the Aboriginals when the colonial government vacated the colony and Australia gained sovereignty. It could be that the prosperity and development that stemmed from the seizure of land from the Aboriginals was seen as a good result.

The need for self determination among other things caused upheaval among the Aboriginals, especially when their cultural sites were desecrated by miners who were given rights on their land without consultation. There was also the issue of real land ownership, the kind that encompassed access,

ownership and control of their land. In their conception, this was a prerequisite for their economic and social growth and development. The Aboriginals exhibited common resolve and spoke with one accord, especially with regards to ownership of land. What they required was a leader to harness their common resolve in order to increase their collective bargain. The three people discussed in the paper offered the required leadership. The three people used different approaches to champion for the land rights of aboriginals to great effect. It is important to note that the approaches used by these key people were unique in their own rights. The Wave Hill walk-off effectively put the claim for land rights on the national scene. It also garnered extensive support from Australian nationals. Gary Foley on the other hand using his national appeals as an historian to articulate issues concerning Aboriginal land rights. The Yirrkala bark petitions 1963 drafted by Galarrwuy Yunupingu set new precedents that paved way for activism on land rights. All these activities and the influence from these key people increased momentum for the movement for Aboriginal land rights in Australian in the 1960s.

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